

**Amendments to the Claims:**

The listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**5 Listing of Claims:**

Claim 1 (currently amended): A method for optimizing normalized image log slope (NILS) of exposed lines of a lithography system comprising:

providing a photomask layout which is applied to an off-axis illumination (OAI) with an aperture of Quasar 90, the photomask layout comprising a first straight line

10 and a second straight line parallel with the first straight line; and

adding a first assist pattern between the first and the second straight lines, the first assist pattern including a plurality of square geometric patterns with similar sizes arranging along a first line direction which is parallel with the first straight line.

15 Claim 2 (original): The method of claim 1, wherein the first assist pattern divides a space between the first and the second straight lines into two equivalent areas.

Claim 3 (canceled)

20 Claim 4 (currently amended): The method of claim 1 [[3]], wherein a length of the square patterns is approximately equal to a space between the first assist pattern and the first straight line and to a space between the first assist pattern and the second straight line.

25 Claim 5 (original): The method of claim 1 further comprising adding a second assist pattern between the first straight line and the first assist pattern, the second assist pattern including a plurality of geometric patterns with similar sizes arranging along a second line direction which is parallel with the first straight line.

30 Claim 6 (original): The method of claim 5, wherein a space between the second assist

pattern and the first assist pattern, and a space between the second assist pattern and the first straight line are approximately equal to a space between the first assist pattern and the second straight line.

5 Claim 7 (original): The method of claim 1 further comprising performing an optical proximity correction (OPC) to produce a corrected photomask layout before the step of adding the first assist pattern into the photomask layout.

10 Claim 8 (currently amended): A method for optimizing NILS of exposed lines of a lithography system comprising:

providing a photomask layout which is applied to an OAI with an aperture of Quasar 90, the photomask layout comprising a plurality of straight lines parallel with each other; and

15 adding a plurality of assist patterns between any two of the adjacent [[the]] straight lines, each of the assist patterns including a plurality of geometric patterns with similar sizes arranging along a first direction which is parallel with the straight lines, ~~the assist patterns between any two of the straight lines approximately dividing a space between the two straight lines into a plurality of equivalent areas wherein a width in a third direction perpendicular to the first direction of the geometric patterns~~  
20 ~~is approximately equal to a space between each of the straight lines and the adjacent assist patterns.~~

25 Claim 9 (currently amended): The method of claim 8, wherein an amount of the assist patterns added between any two of the adjacent straight lines is determined according to the space between the two straight lines.

Claim 10 (original): The method of claim 8, wherein an amount and a width of the assist patterns added between any two of the straight lines are determined according to a numerical aperture (NA) of a lens of the OAI with the aperture of Quasar 90.

30 Claim 11 (original): The method of claim 8, wherein a width of the assist patterns is determined according to a wavelength of the OAI with the aperture of Quasar 90.

Claim 12 (original): The method of claim 8, wherein the wavelength of the OAI with the aperture of Quasar 90 is 248 nanometers (nm).

5 Claim 13 (original): The method of claim 12, wherein the NILS of the straight lines can be optimized to a value above 2.5.

Claim 14 (currently amended): The method of claim 12, wherein a space between [[of]] the straight lines is about 180 to 250 nanometers.

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Claim 15 (original): The method of claim 14, wherein a line width of the straight lines is about 90 nanometers.

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Claim 16 (original): The method of claim 8, wherein the geometric patterns are square patterns.

Claim 17 (canceled)

20 Claim 18 (original): The method of claim 8 further comprising performing an OPC to produce a corrected photomask layout before the step of adding the assist patterns into the photomask layout.

Claim 19 (new): A method for optimizing normalized image log slope (NILS) of exposed lines of a lithography system comprising:

25 providing a photomask layout which is applied to an off-axis illumination (OAI) with an aperture of Quasar 90, the photomask layout comprising a first straight line and a second straight line parallel with and adjacent to the first straight line; and adding a first assist pattern between the first and the second straight lines, the first assist pattern including a plurality of geometric patterns with similar sizes  
30 arranging along a first direction which is parallel with the first straight line, a width in a third direction perpendicular to the first direction of the geometric patterns is approximately equal to a space between the first assist pattern and the second straight

line.

5      Claim 20 (new): The method of claim 19, wherein the length in the third direction perpendicular to the first direction of the geometric patterns is approximately equal to a space between the first assist pattern and the first straight line.

10     Claim 21 (new): The method of claim 19 further comprising adding a second assist pattern between the first straight line and the first assist pattern, the second assist pattern including a plurality of geometric patterns with similar sizes arranging along a second line direction which is parallel with the first straight line.

15     Claim 22 (new): The method of claim 21, wherein a space between the second assist pattern and the first assist pattern, and a space between the second assist pattern and the first straight line are approximately equal to a space between the first assist pattern and the second straight line.

Claim 23 (new): The method of claim 19 further comprising performing an optical proximity correction (OPC) to produce a corrected photomask layout before the step of adding the first assist pattern into the photomask layout.

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